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Over the past three decades, Baltimore's Fifth Councilmanic District has served as a northwest corridor to the good life, as those who acquired the means -- particularly Jewish residents -- moved out to Randallstown, Reisterstown and Owings Mills. Middle-class blacks who followed the Jews into the Fifth also followed them out of it, leaving behind a population much poorer and older.

The district's past City Council representation has not done enough to bring about needed stability. It's time for that to change. Two incumbents have decided not to run for re-election. Iris Reeves, who was elected to serve three terms after completing the unexpired term of her late husband, is retiring. Vera Hall is giving up her seat after two terms to run for council president.

That leaves Rochelle Rikki Spector. In most cases, a district would be best served by having someone with experience on the council. But the Fifth won't lose much without Mrs. Spector. She has not in her 18 years on the council been able to move beyond a pedestrian level. The Fifth needs dynamic leadership that will make its communities destination points for families seeking the good life. Mrs. Spector did her best, but other candidates offer the promise of doing much better.

Few who meet Stephanie Rawlings walk away unimpressed. This daughter of powerful state Del. Howard P. Rawlings is no stranger to politics. At age 25, she is serving her second term on the Democratic State Central Committee. A recent graduate of the University of Maryland School of Law, Ms. Rawlings grew up in Northwest Baltimore and wants young professionals to see the district as a good place to raise families.

Another talent who grew up in the Fifth District and is tired of witnessing its decline is Helen Holton. She is a CPA with her own accounting firm for the past 16 years. Ms. Holton has already begun her public service both as a member of Greater West Hill's Community Association and as treasurer of the Black-Jewish Forum of Baltimore. Ms. Holton says she wants to give back to the community that nurtured her -- the Fifth District.

Several candidates could successfully fill the third council seat. We favor Michele Rosenberg. This mother of four will fight hard to improve Baltimore's public schools. She, too, has been a member of the State Democratic Central

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Committee and has been active in the Friends of Gwynns Falls and Leakin Park and the Dickeyville Neighborhood Association. Michael Eugene Johnson and Robert Berghel are also attractive candidates.

But the best ticket for Fifth District voters, in The Sun's view, consists of Helen Holton, Stephanie Rawlings and Michele Rosenberg.

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